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SUBJECT: PANAMANIAN AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES REGIONAL ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Glazer met with Luis Enrique Torres, Panamanian Ambassador to El Salvador to exchange views on regional issues including foreign investment, elections, and public security. Ambassador Torres expressed his concern over possible violence in the upcoming 2009 Salvadoran elections and expressed Panama's interest in helping to combat transnational crime. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On February 12, Ambassador Glazer received a courtesy call from Luis Enrique Torres Herrera, Panama's Ambassador to El Salvador. During their meeting the two Ambassadors exchanged views on public safety, foreign investment, and the upcoming Salvadoran national elections.

¶3. (C) According to Torres, El Salvador remains relatively unattractive to foreign investment. He argued that corruption in the judicial system and in the government at large must be addressed before foreign investors will have the required confidence to make significant investments in the country.

¶4. (C) Torres was very concerned about 2009 Salvadoran elections and their possible aftermath. He fears the outbreak of violence from extremist elements on both ends of the political spectrum. While he did not identify specific organizations or individuals, he clearly believes that radical political cells and even paramilitary organizations could incite violence and try to radicalize more moderate elements of civil society.

¶5. (C) On the issue of public safety, Ambassador Torres maintained that Panama does not face the same problems of gang violence and organized crime that confront El Salvador and many other Central American countries. He added, however, that Panama has an interest in "lending a hand" in the fight against organized crime in order to contain the problem and keep it from reaching Panama. He was particularly interested in the programs hosted by the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador and asked how Panama could support ILEA and participate in its programs. (Note: Panamanian students have participated in ILEA training from the outset. End note.) Torres said that Panama would like to help El Salvador and its other Central American neighbors, but emphasized that Panama will maintain a "hands off" approach and has no desire to intervene in the internal politics of other Central American nations.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Ambassador Torres' interest in regional security is encouraging; we will look to build on his interest to encourage further support for regional security initiatives under the Merida initiative. We plan to invite Torres to visit the ILEA facility in Santa Tecla and look for opportunities to continue engaging the Panamanian representative in a security dialogue. End Comment.
GLAZER